

The Running

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court...I'm using the insanity defence... heh, heh, heh...

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The Runningby Sheryl Martin

Taking long leisurely strides, the tall man jogged effortlessly along the sidewalk; ignoring the light snow that blew into his face. The grey hooded sweatshirt covered his head and ears; a puff of cold air showing his mouth. A pair of black track pants and a thick set of dark blue gloves made up the jogger's outfit.

His feet pounded along the concrete, slipping every now and then on a patch of ice. But he never broke his rhythm; recovering quickly to hop over the snowbank and go into the street, hugging the right side of the road.

A car raced by, splashing him with slush and water. He didn't notice; his eyes focused on some faraway goal. The beads of sweat mingled with the dirt and mud kicked up by the passing cars; speckling his face in an obscene facade of freckles. He didn't stop or even slow down; in fact the pace increased.

A truck roared by, honking his horn in annoyance at the human daring to share the road. The gravel sprang up in his wake to kick and gouge at the exposed eyes and skin of the jogger.

The figure went faster; now almost into a full-fledged run. Taking great gulps of the cold air, he vaulted the snowbank to land back on the sidewalk; nearly knocking over an elderly woman and her dog, who immediately began to yap fiercely at him.

Panting and skidding on the slick pavement, he ran faster and faster. The road curved to the right and he followed blindly, his vision blurred in sweat and mud and perhaps tears.

"Mulder?"

The voice shocked him; startled him so much that he came to an abrupt stop; his chest heaving. His legs seized the chance, and gave way, dropping him to the ground in a heavy fall.

Dropping her small bag of groceries, Dana Scully ran the short distance to the crouching figure; seeing the heat radiate off her partner in shimmering waves. Grabbing him by the shoulders to steady him, she looked at the bloody face.

"Mulder... are you hurt?"

He stared at her blankly, then shook his head. The hood fell back, revealing his sweat-soaked hair plastered to his head; the thin scratches still oozing blood in spots.

"Oh, Mulder..." Her face was a mixture of worry, concern and thinly-veiled anger. Pulling him roughly to his feet, she gestured to her right. "We're two blocks from my place - lean on me."

A low chuckle broke free as he put his hand on her shoulder, towering over the petite woman as they slowly made their way down the sidewalk; stopping only to pick up the small bag.

Pushing the door open with one hand, she manoeuvred the man through to the couch; dropping the foot in the hallway. After making sure that he wasn't going to pass out on her, Scully took off her trench coat and headed for the bathroom; reappearing a minute later with some towels and the familiar first-aid kit.

For his part Mulder just sat there, his eyes fixed on a point past the wall ahead of him. He blinked when she stripped the soaked shirt from his back; even lifting his arms so she should could pull the hooded sweatshirt over his head, but nothing else.

Taking one of the towels, Scully began to sponge off his chest and back, her face creased with worry. His eyes were vacant to the point of almost being catatonic, but she wasn't ready to call 911 yet. Tossing the towel to one side, she took the damp face cloth and began to gently clean his face; clearing away the mud and exposing the worst of the cuts and gouges.

"You looked like you caught the cat this time." She joked, trying to jolt him out of it. He turned his head to stare at her.

"Scully?" The word came out so softly that she almost thought she had imagined it.

"Yes, it's me." She dabbed at a particularly thick glob of mud on his chin. "You're at my place. You were jogging, and I found you. Or you found me, depending on how you look at it."

His eyes searched hers, lost and questioning. "I was jogging..." A violent shake of his head sent the damp locks from side to side. "I'm where?"

She tenderly brushed a wet strand from the side of his mouth. "You're at my place. I met you two blocks from here. You're exhausted."

He looked down at his stained track pants. "Yah..." Clearing his throat, a flush raced across his face. "Ah... can I use your bathroom to clean up a bit?"

Chuckling, she pointed towards the doorway. "I already put a spare shirt and pants in there. Just in case you wanted to take a shower."

Sheepishly smiling, the tall man staggered into the bathroom and shut the door. Letting a deep sigh escape, Scully walked into her bedroom and pulled off her own stained shirt; replacing it with a fresh sweatshirt. Bunching it up in her hand, she retrieved Mulder's original shirt from the living room; pausing to look towards the bathroom.

Steam billowed out around the half-shut door, wispy streams making their way into the hall. Biting her lip shyly, Scully pushed the door open just enough to grab the soggy running shoes from where she could see them; sitting on the floor by the discarded pants. She snatched them as well; pulling the door quickly shut and heading for the kitchen.

Wiping the worst of the mud from the shoes, she placed them near a heater to try and save them. The pants and shirt she added to her own laundry, making a mental note to make sure she set them aside in their usual spot when they had been washed.

Now if she could only stop blushing...

Opening the drawer where she kept all the delivery menus, she pulled out the newest one. She had a feeling that he would be staying for dinner.

A few minutes later her partner appeared, tugging at the red football jersey.

"You know, I was wondering where I had left this..." Mulder smiled. She returned it with interest.

"When you stayed over that night you were too tired to drive home, remember? You passed out on the couch, and I promised to wash it for you and bring it to the office."

He grinned. "Oh. I thought I'd left it someplace more exciting."

Shaking her head with a soft chuckle, she handed him a cup of coffee; then walked into the living room and sat down in the single chair. He followed, seating himself opposite her on the couch. Grasping her own

mug in both hands, she turned it around and around before speaking.

"Have you figure out what you were running from?" She looked up through the auburn hair falling over her face.

His tongue flicked out to wet his lower lip for a second before responding. "I'm not sure."

"Mulder, you were totally zoned out. You didn't recognise me for a minute. I was really worried." The dark liquid shifted from side to side in the thick ceramic mug. "You scared me, Mulder."

"Sorry." The words carried the weight of truth and sadness. "I just got lost."

"Lost?"

"Lost. In myself." He stared into the coffee before taking a deep gulp. "All I know is that I was running from something, someone."

"And where were you running to?"

His eyes locked with hers; a smile touching his lips. "Maybe it wasn't where as much as who...", almost whispering the words to her. Suddenly it seemed that the only sound in the room was of two people exhaling slowly and in unison.

Just as quickly he turned away from her, getting to his feet and shuffling around the room. "I'll spring for dinner in exchange for the laundry and shower facilities." He looked around. "Where's my wallet?" He spied the billfold on the counter where she had retrieved it from his pants. Putting his hand out, he went to pick it up.

Scampering to her feet, Scully reached for the stack of menus, sitting next to the wallet. "Ah...right. How about we split it and I'll let you pick up the lunch on Monday..." Her hand touched the top menu at the same time as hers, their fingers brushing across each other in the approach.; the connection electrifying.

He froze.

She froze.

Simultaneously they both yanked their hands back.

Mulder chuckled as he put his wallet into his pocket. "Szechuan sounds good right now."

She nodded, feeling the heat in her face. "The usual order?" Picking up the paper, she hid behind it and scanned the list.

"Just the usual, Scully." His voice rose over the thin paper barrier. "And thanks..."

End
file.